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ABSTRACT

This study explored 48 Chinese-American teachers' and preservice teachers' perceptions of the multicultural course requirement in their teacher preparation program. Respondents had participated in one of four multicultural seminars between fall 1998 and fall 1999. They were asked to identify issues and suggest ways to improve this course. Data sources included questionnaires, focus group discussions, university documents, and observations. Results indicated that participants understood and embraced the tenets of multicultural education. Many expressed explicit admiration, appreciation, and respect for multicultural scholars. They could define and suggest ways to implement multicultural theory in their classrooms. This knowledge base and commitment was evident in the classroom presentations, lesson plans, and discussions integrating multicultural theory with curricular content. While participants could align their educational philosophy with multicultural theory, they were aware of the complexity of implementing multicultural theory in classrooms. While hopeful, they were realistic and frustrated with the current K-12 educational system. They not only questioned their personal K-12 experiences, but they were able to understand how the implementation of multicultural pedagogical knowledge could change schooling. They identified resistance as the major barrier to implementation of multicultural education by white teachers. (Contains 45 references.) (SM)

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Preparing Chinese American Teachers: Implications for Multicultural Education

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The research on teachers of color often points out the need to attract, recruit, and retain this population to teach children from groups of color (Boyer & Baptiste, 1996; Gonzalez, 1997; Lenth, 1988 Villegas & Clewell, 1998). Generally, this body of literature is published in ERIC documents or monographs originating from conference paper presentations, program assessments, surveys, and state taskforce reports (Sheets, 2000). These publications address the shortage and attrition of teachers of color and explain alternative teacher preparation models. Some studies describe programs designed to attract particular groups, such as paraprofessionals (Dandy, 1998; Summerhill, Matranga, Peltier,& Hill, 1998; Villegas & Clewell, 1998), emergency credential teachers (Robbins & Campbell, 1996), community college to university partnerships (Anglin, 1989) and high school students (Grohe, 1989). Other research examine special issues such as mandatory state testing (Smith,1984), teaching as a career choice (Gordon, 1994; King, 1993) and teacher experiences in the field (Madsen & Hollins, 1998; Vance, Miller, Humphreys, & Reynolds, 1989). Some studies concentrate on the need to recruit teachers of color for particular disciplines — mathematics, science, and world languages (Anderson, 1992; Loving & Marshall, 1997; National Science Foundation, 1995); special programs - bilingual education, special education, and gifted education (Ford, Grantham, & Harris, 1997; Savelsbergh, 1994) and selective settings — rural and urban (Littleton, 1998; Mattai, 1989; Stewart, 1989; Stoddart, 1991).

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While there is a considerable quantity of scholarship on issues related to recruitment, role models, program models, teacher perception, and mentoring needs of teachers from particular groups of color, such as African American, Latino American, and Native American (see Irvine, 1989: Jones, Young, & Rodriguez, 1999; Rude & Gorman, 1996; Swisher, 1995), the paucity of research on Asian American teachers and/or Chinese American teachers is troubling. For example, an extensive search of the literature using multiple database selections (the following were used: Books in Print A-Z, ERIC Database 1966-2000, Education Abstracts FTX 6/83-12/99, PsycINFO 1984-2000/02, Sociological Abstracts 1963-1999/12 and Social Sciences Abst FTX 2/83-12/99), generated 11,712 items on bilingual education; yet only two conference papers addressed Chinese and/or Asian bilingual teachers. Searches on teacher preparation produced 5,604 listings, with zero relating to Chinese/Asian teachers. While the multicultural education search produced 12,768 entries, there were zero with a focus on Chinese/Asian teachers. The descriptor "Asian Teachers" had 30 entries; however, only 9 were applicable to Asian teachers in the United States. The "Chinese American teacher" descriptor generated three studies. All three compared the ways U.S teachers and Chinese teachers teach mathematics.

This dearth of research contributes to the unobstructed "invisibility" of Asian Americans as front-line participants in the shaping of children, educators, and educational policy. While, Asian and/or Chinese American students are touted as "high achievers" and stereotyped as "model minority students;" within the process of teaching and learning, Chinese American /Asian American teachers apparently play no prominent role. The "research" does not examine what Chinese American teachers bring to teaching, implying by omission that model Chinese American students are a creation of non-Chinese teachers. Unfortunately, once the characterization of ideal student is complete, the next act requires an unceremonious dismissal. The aforementioned is particularly disheartening given the fact that the U.S. Census report of 1990 stated that the Asian American population increased 100 percent in the decade between 1980-1990. No where is this more apparent than in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Asian American children represent 14.5% of the student population on the national level, 40.5% in the State of California, and in San Francisco Unified Public School District, Asian American students represent 50% of the student population of which 33% are Chinese American. Ethnic breakdown was not available on the national and state level. The percentage of Asian American teachers on the national level is 1%. In the State of California they comprise 4.9% of the teaching faculty. In San Francisco Unified School District, 11% of the teachers are of Chinese ancestry. Students of color fluctuate between 75% -80% of the student population and approximately 20-30% of the teaching faculty are teachers of color.

Although the Bay Area is home to a significantly high numbers of Asian Americans, and the Chinese American teaching population is significantly greater than national and state numbers report for Asian American teachers, research on Chinese American teachers is disturbingly limited, even in places where these teachers are visionary and visible. The significance of this study lies in its determined attempt to mitigate the "invisibility" factor of Asian Americans in teaching through the exploration of how Chinese teachers are prepared and how they view their role in preparing children for a culturally and linguistically diverse society.

This study explores Chinese American teachers' perception of the multicultural course requirement in their teacher preparation program. They were asked to identify issues and suggest ways to improve this course. Historical background of Chinese American teachers' in San Francisco Unified School District and their contribution to education is followed by demographic data, methods, findings, and discussion. This research is part of a three-year study examining how Chinese American educators in San Francisco Bay area are prepared to teach.

Chinese American Teachers

For the past three decades, Chinese American teachers in San Francisco Unified School District, have had an active role in defining the needs of Chinese teachers and Chinese children in their classrooms. This information and concerns was shared with community members and agencies as well as the school district. On February 25, 1969 six Chinese American teachers in

the San Francisco Unified School District invited all of the Chinese educators in the district to attend an organizational rally. This historic gathering was the founding meeting of The Association of Chinese Teachers (TACT). Emerging in the midst of the 1960's civil rights struggle, Chinese American educators recognized their collective strength and addressed concerns regarding the needs of Chinese children as a distinct cultural group as well as their "feelings of powerlessness and isolation" and limited job opportunities (Lee, 2000, p. 2).

Approximately one year later, on March 25,1970, the Lau v. Nichols was filed by 13 Chinese students in the District Court in San Francisco on behalf of nearly 3,000 Chinese-speaking students, against the San Francisco Unified School District. This case argued that Chinese-speaking students were denied their rights to an equal education because they did not speak English, the medium of instruction. The Lau v. Nichols Supreme Court Decision of 1974, recognized at the federal and state level, ruled that to be effective, instruction must be bilingual. While the district may have been unaware of the needs of their Chinese students, through this momentous social action, TACT and the San Francisco Chinese American community helped lay the legal foundation for bilingual education for all children in the district, state, and nation. Their role of advocacy and outreach continues today in the struggle to define educational excellence and pursue equity in affirmative action, bilingual education, cross-cultural curriculum, and teacher issues.

Demographic Data

Asian American teachers are underrepresented across the nation. There are 27,510 Asian teachers employed in K-12 public school in the United States, 1% of the teaching force (Digest of Educational Statistics, 1998). The only cultural group with a teaching force less than Asian Americans is the American Indian or Alaskan group with a total of 20,064 teachers. Due to the categorization of Chinese Americans in a monolithic pan-ethnic group, it is not possible to know how many of these teachers are Chinese American.

In the State of California there has not been a significant increase in the percentage of Asian teachers over the past 20 years. Demographic data for the year 1997-98, on the number of teachers in California Public Schools by ethnic groups show a total of 13,174 teachers (Asian 10,390; Pacific Islander; 527; and Filipino, 2,257) which is 4.9% of the teaching force (California Basic Educational Data System, 2000). The Language Census State Wide Summary, Spring 1998 reports that there are 25,211 Cantonese speakers and 10,300 Mandarin speakers in K-12 grades classified as "Limited English-proficient" and 47,446 (Cantonese 26,412, Mandarin 21,034) labeled "Fluent English-proficient". This information suggests that Chinese American teachers are the majority of the teachers categorized in the "Asian" group.

San Francisco Unified School District provides ethnic breakdowns for both students and teachers. The 1999-2000 demographic data indicates that 33% of the students and 11% (of the teachers in the district are Chinese Americans (San Francisco Unified School District, 2000). Most Chinese American students are segregated in specific geographical areas in schools that offer Chinese bilingual programs or they are dispersed throughout the city to provide racial and ethnic diversity. San Francisco Unified School District Bilingual Department reports that there are between 350-400 Chinese American teachers, of which 217 teach Chinese children in bilingual classrooms. It is important to note that rarely are Chinese American students and teachers assigned to schools with a majority of African American students. Likewise, African American students and teachers are not likely to be placed in schools with a majority Asian student population.

Method

This qualitative study explored Chinese American teachers (CAT) and preservice Chinese American teacher candidates' (PCAT) perception of a required multicultural course in their teacher preparation program. They were asked to identity issues and to suggest ways to improve this course. Qualitative procedures for data collection and analysis suggested by Miles and Huberman (1984), Guba and Lincoln (1981), Silverman (1993), and Eisner (1994) were followed

to document, interpret, and substantiate the perceptions the participants. Multiple data sources (triangulation) were used to explore participant appraisal of the content, process, and context of the multicultural course.

The data sources included questionnaires, focus group discussions, university documents, and observations. The questionnaire and focus groups examined teacher perception of their educational experience, value of course work, and solicited suggestions for course improvement. The questionnaire was administered in a whole group classroom setting. Focus groups were audio taped and simultaneously transcribed verbatim by a trained stenocaptioners. University documents included cultural self-descriptions, reflections of the assigned readings, and lesson plans. Students were observed for approximately 40 hours during 10 to 15 sessions. The data generated from the multiple sources were reviewed by two researchers, coded, reduced, and used to validate, confirm, or disconfirm the significance of the participants' points of view and emerging assertions (Denzin, 1970; Erickson, 1986; Miles & Huberman, 1984).

Participants (N = 48) were 24 Chinese American teachers (N = 24) preservice Chinese American teacher candidates (N = 24). All participated in one of four multicultural seminars between Fall 1998 – Fall 1999. The CAT group, taught in Chinese bilingual programs, took the multicultural course as a cohort which was taught by Chinese American instructors. Approximately half of these teachers had previously taken multicultural courses as part of their initial teacher preparation program generally taught by White instructors. The other CAT teachers had not taken multicultural courses because they were not prepared as teachers in the U.S. or their credential program did not require them. Because a significant number of Chinese bilingual teachers are not prepared in the United States, a key focus of the Bilingual Summer Institute was to integrate diversity elements to the elementary bilingual curriculum. The CAT group included five 1st or 2nd generation native born teachers. Fourteen teachers (born in Hong Kong, Peru?) came to the United States at a young age (average age 4-7). Five of the teachers in this group were educated abroad, immigrating to the U.S. as adolescents or young adults. The

PCAT group included five students preparing for Chinese bilingual credentials and 20 who expressed commitment to teach in diverse urban settings. PCAT students took the multicultural course with other preservice Chinese American candidates and were taught by the first author. They were in classrooms with students from other groups of color, however Whites were the majority in number. Fourteen PCAT's were 1st or 2nd generation native born, while the remaining six (born in Hong Kong) came to the United States at a young age (average age 4). Fifteen PCAT's revealed that they experienced Chinese language loss and three attended Chinese Saturday school for 12 years.

Findings

The data revealed that Chinese American teachers and preservice Chinese American teacher candidates understood and embraced the tenets of multicultural education. Many expressed explicit admiration, appreciation, and respect for multicultural scholars. They were able to define and suggest ways to implement multicultural theory in their classrooms. This knowledge base and commitment was evident in the classroom presentations, lesson plans, and discussions integrating multicultural theory with curricular content.

While the participants were able to align their educational philosophy with multicultural theory, they were aware of the complexity involved in the implementation of multicultural theory in classrooms. They perceived that their cultural experiences gave them unique insights to diversity issues. While hopeful, they were realistic and frustrated with the current K-12 educational system. The following patterns emerged from the data: (1) critical examination of their K-12 experiences, (2) factors influencing multicultural education implementation, and (3) suggestions for improving course requirements and pedagogical practices in university courses. Pseudonyms are used throughout to protect the privacy of the participants. "American" pseudonyms are used for participants with "American" first names.

Examination of K-12 Experiences

The purpose of schooling as well as personal K-12 schooling experiences were questioned. They were aware of the toll of assimilation inherent in the educational system where the "Chinese culture was not mentioned or appreciated." Statements such as "I seldom heard mention of anything that my culture added to the value of this country" (Heather, PCAT); and, "I was never encouraged to identify my own positions, interests, ideologies, and assumptions. I was taught to accept the facts and to learn to memorize" (Sandra, PCAT) were prevalent. Wanda (PCAT) explained, "Our schools were shaped for middle-class White families. To succeed academically in the U.S. I had to give up part of my culture. Those who refused to become Americanized, were seen as bad students by the teacher." Julie, a first generation PCAT summarized the feelings characteristic of this group:

> The regard I had for the school system is deeply altered. I have found myself questioning the purpose of school and scrutinizing its policies and practices more closely. The standards I once valued do not seem as important to me. I can see how conforming and narrow they are. I did not even realize that throughout my entire primary and secondary education I had been judging myself according to a set of standards that was not inclusive of my potential. (Julie)

Karen (PCAT), taught in a bilingual classroom without a credential immigrated at age five, explained the difficulty of having to adapt to an alien school environment:

> In retrospect of my childhood, I probably would have appreciated a teacher trying to understand where I was coming from. I did have caring teachers but some of them did not understand where I was coming from. I was a new immigrant from Hong Kong and I knew very little English. I was scared. (Karen)

Most of the participants indicated they would incorporate multicultural content in their classrooms. They felt they did not know enough about other cultures, but believed they were responsible to "expose children to their own culture as well as other cultures" (Bob, PCAT). Most felt that they did not experience a multicultural education in their schooling experiences.

The need to provide multiple perspectives was linked to empowerment — "We belong here too!" (Kathy, CAT) and responsible citizenship. Jane's (CAT) statement epitomized this multicultural orientation: "We have to develop socially responsible citizens who are open and accepting of various points of view, cultures, and languages."

Factors Influencing Multicultural Education Implementation

While accepting that multicultural education was necessary, both groups were aware of the resistance to multicultural education by the greater society, their personal risks involved in terms of job security, and the probability that they would not see multicultural education consistently implemented in their lifetime. Patti (1st generation, PCAT) poignantly explained: "it is with sadness that I observe the continued resistance and seemingly uphill battle for a fundamental change in thinking that would allow for a widespread acceptance of multicultural education." Scott (PCAT) added, "When I talk to teachers about multicultural education, I do not get the responses I expect. I remember one teacher telling me that she thought the extra CLAD courses she had to take were a complete waste of time."

Gloria (2nd generation, PCAT) stated:

> Teachers or teachers-in-training also happen to be themselves mirrors of society — many do not want to be multiculturalists and do not want educational equity for their students or social mobility for their students' families. The status quo benefits them and it is to their advantage to maintain the one-up, one-down relationships. They will simply grit their teeth through training programs. They consciously plan to work in locations where they needn't bother with the multicultural stuff, or, "those people." Chances are they will be welcomed, supported, nurtured, and be networked sufficiently to succeed in the teacher field without experiencing any angst about their lack of concern for multicultural education. (Gloria)

Many participants stated that they worried about the honesty and commitment of White teachers. Jenna (PCAT) wrote, "As I looked around the room, the majority of the people were White and there are a lot of White people out there who think they are superior." Yuan (1st generation, PCAT) was more candid:

> There is an underlying insecurity on the part of White monolingual, middle class White teachers when issues of race, culture, and language are brought to scrutiny. One only needs to look at dilapidated public school buildings, lack of textbooks, and fierce determination to squash bilingual education, and one can see that people of color are truly, totally on their own to fight for their rights." (Yuan)

Suggestions for Improvement

Most of the participants felt that courses in teacher preparation programs in general and multicultural courses in particular are designed for the dominant group. They identified issues not addressed in multicultural courses – language loss, accent, name change, discomfort around White people, immigrant vs native born, perceived lack of respect in school settings, conflict among groups of color, ways to interact with White parents, and assumptions of knowledge of culture. Since diversity issues were often from a White perspective and White students generally dominated discussions, these students were often disgusted, angered, and disturbed by comments made by other students. However, they were not surprised. Julie (PCAT) felt it was "incredulous that there are still teachers who hold prevailing attitudes of White superiority and do not even recognize it." PCAT students did not feel compelled to respond and explain how they felt because "silence" was a coping strategy, when faced with discomfort and confrontation.

The participants who had taken ethnic studies courses felt strongly that all teachers would benefit from the "transformative academic knowledge" gained in these courses that promote cultural awareness and historical information about their own and other cultural groups of color. They also felt that ethnic studies classes heighten their sense of ethnic identity. A few students were critical of ethnic studies and/or multicultural courses taught by "White professors" because

they were taught in a "Eurocentric fashion." These students felt that their insights, grounded in experiential cultural knowledge within the Chinese American community as well as the common dominating contexts, were neither taken seriously, validated, nor examined in depth. They also felt White students, generally a majority in number, dominated the participatory discourse and the content focus in multicultural courses. They felt, that most Chinese American and Asian student reverted to a "silent" coping role, or purposefully resisted their prescribed responsibility of "enlightening" others on the idiosyncratic nuances of the "inscrutable" Chinese American culture.

These Chinese American teachers and Chinese American teacher candidates felt that small group, rather than large group discussions, were more valuable and allowed them opportunity to express opinions and ideas "more comfortably without feeling embarrassed." Bob's (PCAT) comments shows that small groups provided him more opportunity to participate: "I am more of a listener than a talker. I think it is more worthwhile to listen than to say nonsense things. In the many small group activities, I was engaged and I was more willing to share my viewpoints and perspectives."

Discussion

The acceptance of multicultural education and understanding the reality and complexity involved in the implementation of multicultural education demonstrated by these participants suggests that for these Chinese American teachers and preservice Chinese American teacher candidates the ways in which multicultural courses are taught needs to be addressed. Most often, multicultural education is taught from the perspective of preparing teachers for diverse populations, rather than from the standpoint of preparing teachers of color for diverse populations (Sheets, 2000). For example, some scholars believe "good teaching is good teaching" and contextual factors and the cultural heritage of the teacher and children are inconsequential, while others believe that preparing the primarily White, monocultural, female teacher education students to teach in culturally diverse settings is problematic because the major

influence on the behavior of teachers is their own school experiences (Haberman, 1996; Zeichner &Tabachnick, 1981).

A significant finding in this study is that Chinese American teachers and preservice Chinese American teacher candidates, not only questioned their personal K-12 experiences, but they were able to understand how the implementation of multicultural pedagogical knowledge can change schooling. The acknowledgement of change in "traditional practices" and their motivation to create multicultural educational experiences for the children they teach, suggests that they are capable of reframing the nature of teaching. Therefore, Lorie's (1975) and Kennedy's (1999) assertions that the "apprenticeship of observation," entire childhoods spent observing teachers teach, as one of the ways teachers internalize the nature of teaching, along with foundational/methods courses and teaching experiences, potentially may not have as powerful effect on these participants. Therefore, these Chinese American teachers and preservice Chinese American teacher candidates, aware of the issues of diversity inherent in public education, as experienced in the past and currently practiced, may not benefit from multicultural courses that concentrate on changing values, minimizing racism, and creating inclusive cultural positions. If Hollins (1996) cultural typology were used, these Chinese American teachers and preservice Chinese American teacher candidates would most likely benefit from more advanced cultural mediated pedagogy representative of Type II and Type II teachers. The content and process in their multicultural coursework would differ from what may be needed by White teachers and White preservice teacher candidates.

These participants identified resistance as the major barrier to the implementation of multicultural education by White teachers. On the other hand, cognizant of their current level of knowledge and assessment of their inadequacies, they both validated their cultural and linguistic strengths and identified their lack of knowledge of other cultural groups as their major limitation. This ability to metacognate — to monitor and reflect on their own learning — implies that they may be more likely to transfer learned theoretical multicultural knowledge to their classrooms.

Bransford, Brown, and Cocking (1999) refer to this as "conditionalized" knowledge, which is the sense of when and how what has been learned can be used. Additionally, the ability to transfer and use multicultural knowledge to a classroom setting, suggests that they understand the need to teach themselves about other cultures.

The explicit recognition of the psychological and academic benefits from the ethnic studies courses taken by these teachers and their ability to transfer this knowledge to multicultural educational theory and practice, may signify that the "content" knowledge (knowledge of culture) in multicultural education was perceived to be missing. These teachers maintained that the a focus on advocacy, acceptance, and/or pedagogy — information why and how to teach multiculturally may not be enough to ensure implementation. This concurs with Bransford, et al.'s (1999) supposition that content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge are both critical yet different constructs in the teaching-learning process. This finding also suggests that a strategic move might be to require ethnic studies courses as prerequisites to multicultural educational theory. This would advantage teachers with a greater depth, breadth, and quality of cultural content knowledge.

Conclusion

In 1969, John Lum, one of the founders of TACT stated in the first newsletter: "There was no coherent philosophy about dealing with Chinese students. The San Francisco Unified School District did not see the Chinese as a distinct group and the curriculum was the same as that given to white students. It was a benign neglect." (Lee, 2000, p1). Today, while most institutions continue to prepare their Chinese students in teacher preparation programs with a generic model designed for the dominant population, it is critical that teacher preparation programs recognize the need to design credentialing programs to specifically prepare Chinese teachers to meet the needs of the Chinese American children and community. Chinese American teacher voice, from this research demonstrates that the invisibility perceived by the dominating

culture , is not a reality in the ways the teachers in this study understand their place, role, and status as educators of Chinese American children.

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